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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000267

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR A A/S WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR MCDERMOTT, SHAPIRO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: FM SALLOUKH AND NEA ACTING A/S FELTMAN
DISCUSS SYRIA, MIDDLE EAST PEACE, 1701

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Lebanese Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh told visiting Near Eastern Affairs Acting Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman, NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa Daniel Shapiro, and the Ambassador that support for Lebanon's sovereignty and independence was most important for Lebanon. He said Lebanon's relationship with Syria was markedly improved and encouraged the U.S. to engage with Syria, which would also benefit Lebanon. Acting A/S Feltman reaffirmed strong U.S. support for Lebanon and said the new U.S. administration sought "sustained and principled engagement" in the region, including Syria, and perhaps Iran. Acting A/S Feltman and Senior Director Shapiro informed the Minister they were going to Damascus March 7 to begin the conversation with Syria, but had modest expectations.

2. (C) Salloukh urged the U.S. to reach a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict soon. Acting A/S Feltman explained the U.S. was committed to seeking a two-state "solution" and was not only interested in the peace "process" for process' sake. He urged Salloukh and other Arab League ministers to consider the ability of any unified Palestinian authority to behave as a future state. Salloukh complained about Israeli commitment to full implementation of UNSCR 1701, while Acting A/S Feltman said responsibility for 1701 rests with all parties and expressed concern about Lebanon's efforts to control its border with Syria. End summary.

3. (SBU) NEA Acting A/S Jeffrey Feltman, NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa Dan Shapiro, and the Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh at his Foreign Ministry office on March 6. Ramy Mortada, Chief of Cabinet to the Minister, Hani Shmayteli, an advisor in the Chief of Cabinet office, and Majdi Ramadan, head of the Americas desk at the MFA, NEA Staff Assistant Oni Blair, Pol/Econ Chief, and Poloff also attended the meeting. A A/S Feltman also took advantage of the half-hour protocol visit to convey his greetings to fellow Amal member and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, who had traveled to Iran and Oman.

U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH SYRIA
BENEFICIAL TO LEBANON

14. (C) Salloukh told his guests that Lebanon's relationship with its "sister country" had improved considerably after the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria in late 2008. Salloukh said that although Syria had not yet named its ambassador to Lebanon, Lebanon's Ambassador to Syria Michel Khoury would arrive in Damascus in approximately two weeks.

15. (C) Salloukh also believed U.S. engagement with Syria would have a positive effect on Lebanon. In a show of pragmatism, he said that there should not be any expectation that all of the problems between Syria and the U.S. would be solved overnight, but said engagement was a step forward. Salloukh characterized the Obama administration's early appointment of Middle East Special Envoy George Mitchell as a positive sign. Calling Syrian FM Walid Moallem a "mature diplomat," Salloukh advised the new U.S. administration to "work, cooperate, and coordinate" with the Syrian regime to "forget about the past and start a new era."

16. (C) Acting A/S Feltman reaffirmed U.S. support for Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. He said President Obama planned for "sustained and principled" U.S. engagement in the region, to include Syria and, perhaps, Iran. He informed Salloukh that he and Shapiro would visit Damascus March 7 for talks, but that the U.S. retained modest expectations of the outcome. Acting A/S Feltman added that the U.S. would watch closely Syria's responses to U.S. overtures in the weeks and months ahead because the U.S. was not interested in "talking just to talk;" rather, it was interested in talking to address concerns and to achieve

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goals.

SALLOUKH: "ISRAEL SHOULD
CONSIDER THE ARAB PEACE
INITIATIVE"

17. (C) Turning to the issue of Middle East peace, Salloukh expressed hope that the U.S. would broker a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict soon. Acting A/S Feltman explained that the U.S. was committed to assisting the parties to reach a two-state solution and was not simply interested in the process for process' sake. He counseled Salloukh and his counterparts in the Arab League to focus its summit in Doha at the end of March on how any agreed unified Palestinian authority would behave as a possible state in the region. The Palestinian Authority should behave in a way that brings us closer, not further, to a two-state solution and be a responsible partner for peace, he said.

18. (C) The Arab Peace Initiative (API), should also be used as a positive element toward achieving a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, Acting A/S Feltman said. Salloukh agreed, but questioned whether Israel wanted to live in peace in the region after its initial rejection of the API.

UNSCR 1701

19. (C) Salloukh proudly declared that Lebanon was more stable and more tranquil now than in recent years. He was hopeful that the security situation would remain calm through the June 7 parliamentary elections. He acknowledged, however, that there were still problems hindering the full implementation of UNSCR 1701. Salloukh blamed part of the problem on Israel because of its continued occupation of both Ghajar and Sheba'a Farms. He also blamed those who sought to undermine the government by launching rockets from south Lebanon into Israel, which the GOL strongly condemned. Salloukh, however, praised the cooperation between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south. Acting A/S Feltman reminded the Minister that 1701 was the responsibility of all parties,

and included Lebanon's efforts to control its border with Syria. Acting A/S Feltman promised he would raise the issue with his Syrian interlocutors as well.

¶10. (C) Senior Director Shapiro urged also the GOL to take serious steps to control the Lebanese-Syrian border because the U.S. was concerned that Syria planned to provide SA-8 anti-aircraft missiles to Hizballah in the near future. Should this occur, he said, Israel could decide to take an offensive action which would set back the 1701 implementation process and potentially derail other regional peace initiatives -- an outcome that would serve no one, Shapiro said.

¶11. (U) NEA Acting Assistant Secretary Jeffrey D. Feltman and NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa have cleared this message.
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